

# LEADERSHIP FORUM

Baltimore, MD

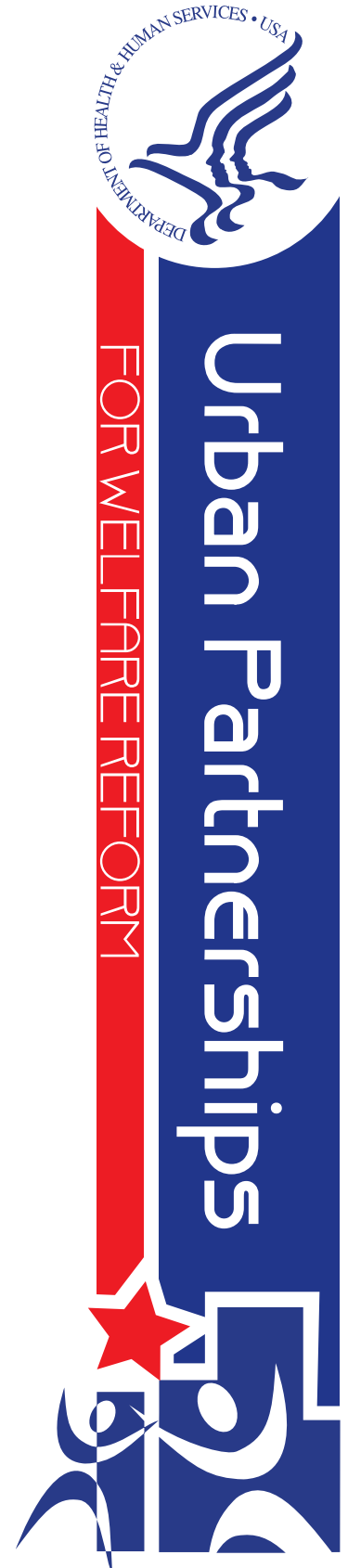
March 2006

## I. Introduction

The Urban Partnerships Initiative was designed by the Administration for Children and Families to support the work of TANF stakeholders in urban environments by promoting shared learning, enhancing cities' performance management, and developing strategies to improve services to families so that they may achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. Under contract with Caliber, ICF International, ACF has hosted three Academies, made on-site technical assistance visits directly to the cities, and provided in-person, telephone and Web-based TA to the cities. One example of in-person TA is the recent Urban Partnerships Leadership Forum. The two-day Leadership Forum, "Looking Back, Moving Forward," described in this report is the fourth meeting of Academy cities hosted by the Urban Partnerships Initiative. This Leadership Forum built on the previous focus on collaboration and service improvement to provide new strategies for full engagement and preparation for TANF Reauthorization, and provided a forum for peers to share information about their experiences, promising practices, and program models used in supporting full engagement for TANF families. Like previous meetings, this Forum used peer-to-peer learning as a model for success.

Two team members from each city were invited to this Forum to reconvene and discuss the impact of the Urban Partnerships Initiative to date, successes, remaining challenges, and the importance of collaboration. Additionally, Federal partners from the Office of Family Assistance announced a new tool to help Urban Partners collaborate on effective program implementation and service delivery- the Urban Partnerships Community of Practice. The Community of Practice is an online password-protected environment for city teams to come together, continue dialogue, and share documents after the conclusion of face-to-face meetings.

Setting the context for the Leadership Forum, Urban Partners had the opportunity to hear a presentation by OFA Deputy Director, Grant E. Collins II. Mr. Collins framed critical issues for continuing the work of moving clients toward self-sufficiency. Following this framework, each of the ten cities gave a brief presentation on their TANF programs over the past year. The remainder of the Forum was designated to helping leaders from the Urban Partnerships cities "move forward" by addressing challenges to achieving full engagement and fostering continued collaboration for the city partners. Key lessons from each of these sessions are highlighted in this report.



## II. Framing the Critical Issues

The Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) is the latest wave in a series of changes in welfare reform. The language around TANF Reauthorization incorporated into the DRA recalibrates the caseload reduction credit and emphasizes the importance of engaging all clients in appropriate work activities. These two changes increase the effective work participation rate, and will require States and communities to develop effective engagement strategies and promising practices for serving TANF clients. Mr. Grant E. Collins II, Deputy Director of the Office of Family Assistance, provided a framework for considering the key issues of TANF Reauthorization by examining the critical issues for the partner cities.<sup>1</sup>

With the recalibration of the caseload reduction credit, performance management is key to implementing successful programs to delivery appropriate services. For example, Georgia uses a “50 percent club” to show worker-by-worker participation rates in a report card. These tools can help cities excel in serving TANF families. Mr. Collins discussed a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study that was conducted on ten states, *HHS Should Exercise Oversight to Help Ensure TANF Work Participation Is Measured*

### Key questions in DRA framework–

- Does your program require substantial engagement in work activities?
- Does your exception/sanction policy help or prevent full participation?
- Can you identify all employed on the caseload and those leaving with jobs?
- Have you a plan to address those with no hours?
- Does your performance management program inform staff and managers?
- Do you know where your caseload is?
- Can you document what they are doing?

*Consistently Across States.*<sup>2</sup> Concluding that HHS lacks specific criteria for determining hours, internal controls, and definitions for work activities, GAO recommended that HHS exercise oversight in work participation measurements used to assess performance, provide clear guidance for how states should define categories of work. Therefore, through the DRA, HHS will continue to monitor and regulate how states calculate the participation rates to assure that the measure is consistent and uniform across the country.<sup>3</sup>

## III. Looking Back

Representatives from city teams made brief presentations sharing successes and promising strategies since the last Academy, highlighting current approaches and lessons learned in developing both short- and long-term solutions.

**Atlanta**– About one year ago, Atlanta implemented performance improvements to add incentives for successful caseworker performance. For example, caseworkers are eligible to receive a \$500 bonus for achieving a 60 percent work participation rate among their caseload. Atlanta has expanded their report card system to hold workers on every level accountable for work participation. Clients now have one worker for all the programs that they need from “intake to self-sufficiency.” Due to the system-wide changes, Atlanta has seen a caseload reduction from 5,975 in December 2003 to 1,800 in January 2006, and the work participation rate has increased from 9 percent to over 60 percent.

### Atlanta

- Implemented “Success” – a performance measurement system which holds caseworkers individually responsible for the outcomes of their caseloads.
- Triage clients into 3 categories: Not Job Ready, Near Job Ready, or Job Ready.

<sup>2</sup> This article is available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05821.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The Final Rule with the specific regulations was published by June 30, 2006 by OFA. States must submit their Verification plan by September 30, 2006, and the Legislation will go into effect October 1, 2006 (FY 2007). To view the Regulations, please see: <http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/reauthorization/index.htm>.

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Collin’s PowerPoint presentation can be found at: <http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/reauthorization/index.htm>.

**Baltimore-** Since the start of the Urban Partnerships Initiative, Baltimore has re-focused its program, implemented a new up-front engagement program, and increased the performance monitoring program. As a result, the city's engagement rate increased from 50 percent to 90 percent, and job placements increased from 3,000 to 4,000 annually. Additionally, the average monthly caseload for the city of Baltimore has declined from 17,654 in 2001 to 13,604 in 2006. Baltimore has seen success in policy and perception changes including a new focus on upfront engagement at the time of application and increased accountability.

#### Baltimore

- Successfully procured additional workforce service contracts which are 100% pay for performance.
- Implemented CenterStat to improve sharing of promising practices among FIP centers.
- Implemented Fresh Start initiative for 60-month cases.
- Implemented New Beginnings program to include up-front engagement.

**Boston-** Boston is currently at a transition phase and attempting to move forward with a goal of a 70 percent work participation rate. Massachusetts has had success in moving clients toward self-sufficiency by enhancing performance-based contracts, adding a new integrated skills training and education program model with ESOL components, and adding an industry-based skills training in partnership with area employers. Challenges

#### Boston

- Improved screening, assessment, and program services to the disabled.
- Developed acceptance among workforce partners to engage exempted clients.
- Increased Food Stamp participation and reduced FS error rate.
- Success in engaging disabled population.

include Management Information System changes, streamlining the sanction process, and addressing housing issues among the large homeless population.

**Dallas/Fort Worth-** Dallas/Fort Worth's goal throughout the Urban Partnerships Initiative has been to address the needs of clients with multiple barriers. Despite the challenges related to serving Hurricane Katrina evacuees from the Gulf Coast, Dallas/Fort Worth found that flexible attitudes among staff improved service delivery. A new program was implemented due to successful collaboration with employers throughout the Dallas/Fort Worth and New Orleans areas by creatively conducting video interviews. Ongoing challenges include engaging two parent households, an increase in staff turnover, and the transient client population brought on by Hurricane Katrina. Dallas/Fort Worth would like to continue to improve programs to serve clients with multiple barriers, and re-focus its goals toward serving the disabled population.

#### Dallas/Fort Worth

- Implemented successful screening process.
- Implemented full family sanction.
- Collaboration with local employers.
- Outreach through Business Access program that places computers in homes of clients to enable job search and classes online to earn degrees.

**Detroit-** Due to recent budget cuts, Detroit has had to learn to "do more with less." Detroit is currently operating a local pilot program emphasizing assessment and counseling, and a program focused on "revolving door" clients by partnering with Goodwill and Workforce Development. Detroit was recently selected by the State of Michigan to implement the first stages of the JET (Jobs, Education and Training) program, and a distance learning program providing TANF clients with laptops. Detroit has had success with these programs as well as promoting system-wide accountability, performance-based contracting,

and by placing a greater emphasis on upfront assessment and counseling. Detroit's program has become more customer-driven, and services have been coordinated among agencies.

#### Detroit

- Local pilot implemented for emphasizing assessment and counseling.
- Implementing JET (Jobs, Education, Training) Program for upfront assessment.
- Implemented program similar to Dallas/Fort Worth to place computers in homes of clients.

**Minneapolis-** Minneapolis has experienced a 22 percent caseload reduction in the past two years by implementing a Diversionary Work Program. Forty-seven percent of applicants find jobs within two months. Clients on the diversion program are not counted as part of the TANF caseload because Minneapolis utilizes emergency assistance payments for four months. Reauthorization challenges for Minneapolis include the loss of waivers for food stamps, universal participation, and document retention. Despite these challenges, by focusing its Work First Initiative and by implementing a "soft skills" 2-week training program, the work participation rate has increased to 43 percent.

#### Minneapolis

- Implemented Diversionary Work Program.
- Learned from St. Louis on reducing Food Stamp error rate.
- Initiated a statewide EITC outreach campaign.

**Oakland-** Oakland has experienced a 20 percent reduction in their workforce, a change in leadership, and a restructuring of the business processes for their TANF program. The program has achieved success in the establishment of performance-based employer linked contracts with community partners and in opening a new self-sufficiency center. Revisiting the Employment Services Business Process and moving toward the use of

JobStat, modeled after New York City, Oakland is making progress towards helping families move to self-sufficiency. Perceptions have changed in all systems to embrace collaboration towards the common goal of increasing engagement and improving outcomes for families.

#### Oakland

- Restructured CalWORKS business process.
- Saving millions of dollars through new Foster Care Automated Tracking System.
- Restructured contracts for Employer Link Services and Community Services.
- Established performance based employer-linked contracts with community partners.
- Opened new Self Sufficiency Center in North County/Oakland.

**Omaha-** Omaha had a very successful 2005 tax season with \$51 million in EITC returned to the community. They have developed a LIFE skills training program, "Keys to Life," to aid in the identification and elimination of barriers to work. Additionally, clients have been engaged at the intake level to increase work participation, and attitudes have been changed to encompass a more holistic approach to case management including Family Centered Practice, which has been successful in large part because of the focus on employment. Due to partnering with employers to increase engagement, Omaha received a perfor-

#### Omaha

- More tax preparation sites added to encourage EITC filing by partnering with United Way.
- Creation of standardized State EF monitoring and reporting tools to assist in participation, time limits monitoring and contract monitoring and performance.
- Increased partnership with employers for job site placements.
- Increased employment of TANF customers with criminal backgrounds.

mance bonus for one of the top ten places in the country for employment retention in 2003.

**Seattle-** Seattle has implemented a Work First program to increase accountability through a Government Management Accountability and Performance system and is in the process of implementing a full family sanction policy. Recent successes include collaboration on best practices for client engagement across a variety of partner agencies. As part of the Work First program, the city has partnered with the faith-based community to develop a new transportation initiative. Seattle has also successfully collaborated with the Division of Child Support Enforcement to increase child support collections.

#### Seattle

- Implementation of a Work First program redesign to increase participation and accountability.
- Developed a process for full family sanctions.
- Implemented Food Stamp and Employment and Training Pilot (FSET).
- Developed a transportation initiative for the WorkFirst participants in partnership with faith-based organizations.

**St. Louis-** St. Louis has implemented a workforce program for TANF participants called CAP (Career Assistance Program). This program, designed to assist TANF clients in reaching their career goals, is a partnership between the state and local level Workforce Investment Board and TANF agencies. The main focus includes assessment, developing an individual employment plan, job readiness, skills, training, job placement and retention. St. Louis has experienced a caseload decrease of 44 percent since 2001, from 12,319 to 7,825 TANF families. Currently, 2,000 adults are engaged in work activities through the CAP program, including job readiness training, skills training, job search, fulltime and part-time employment, and community work experience.

#### St. Louis

- Partnership between State and local agencies to for a Career Assistance Program (CAP).
- Partnership between St. Louis and community- and faith-based organizations that received an abstinence grant.
- Expansion of the Career Pathway Life Science Initiative.
- Partnership with the Fatherhood Support Initiative.

#### Feedback from Urban Partners:

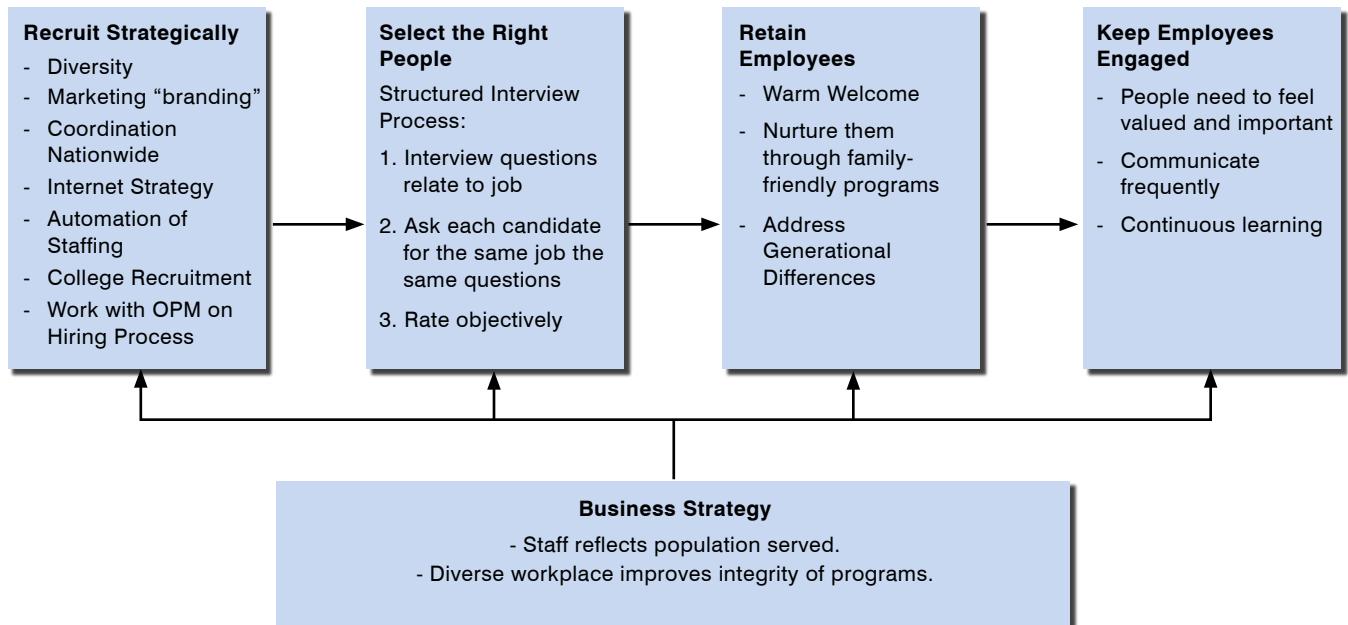
- “It has been extremely helpful to hear from other cities especially to know we have similar challenges and program strategies.”
- “This partnership is the only “hands on” community of experts available to states, cities, counties as we move forward in serving the victims of poverty.”
- “Participation has allowed us to avoid many of the pitfalls others have experienced in designing and implementing pilots or significant program changes.”
- “The relationships that have been formed during the past few years and the benefits received from those relationships and on site visits.”
- “We have implemented programs shared from other partners- plan to use additional ideas.”

*Note: Comments were taken from evaluations completed at the conclusion of the Leadership Forum.*

#### IV. Staff Turnover and Morale: Innovative Approaches to Doing More with Less

Although Urban Partners have been successful in achieving program goals, staff turnover and morale has continued to be a challenge for providing clients with the best service delivery. Ms. Felicity Sola-Carter, Social Security Administration, offered participants strategies for recruiting and maintaining staff in their home cities. As the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Human Resources, Ms. Sola-Carter is aware of the challenges of increased

workloads, limited budget and resources, working with individuals with disabilities who want to become self-sufficient through employment, improving operational service and efficiency through the use of technology, and working with a diverse clientele including customers with limited English proficiency. The following chart provides strategies for recruiting and retaining staff.





## V. Moving Forward-- Maintaining the Momentum

Issue	Suggestions
Engaging the Hard-to-Serve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Utilize Vocational Rehabilitation as a work activity</li> <li>■ Partner with the Office Disabilities Employment Policy</li> <li>■ Hire System Navigators</li> <li>■ Educate Employers</li> <li>■ Provide Wrap Around Services</li> <li>■ Use NDNH matching</li> </ul>
Policy Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use research to prove necessary changes</li> <li>■ Direct communication with Governor and Legislature</li> </ul>
Reengaging Sanctioned Clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Solicit faith-based and community organizations</li> <li>■ Give a single worker the sanctioned caseload to reengage</li> <li>■ Provide a "soft skills" workshop</li> </ul>
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Computer leasing can save money</li> <li>■ Worthwhile to invest in technology to save money</li> </ul>

As Urban Partners, the participants in this Leadership Forum have been change agents in their home cities. Over the course of their participation in this Initiative, great progress has been made in serving TANF families and supporting their journey to self-sufficiency. A vehicle for Urban Partners to maintain the momentum will be the Urban Partnerships Community of Practice (CoP). The Community of Practice is designed as a shared electronic space where Urban Partners can share and review documents, exchange ideas, dialogue via questions and answers, and plan events. This Community of Practice will "steward the knowledge assets" of the Urban Partner cities "where practitioners connect to solve problems, share ideas, set standards, build tools, and develop relationships with peers and stakeholders."<sup>4</sup> This environment fosters continued collaboration and problem solving before and after face-to-face meetings, the success of which is contingent upon engagement among partners from these cities.

The Urban Partners attending this Leadership Forum have successfully moved families in their home cities to self-sufficiency using a variety of innovative approaches. Cities remained concerned about upcoming challenges with engaging clients with multiple barriers on the path to self-sufficiency.

During this Leadership Forum Urban Partners had the opportunity to collaborate on three challenging areas for their TANF programs- achieving integration across systems, performance based contracting, and morale and development. These sessions offered city leaders the opportunity to collaborate on challenges and best practices.

As Urban Partners since 2001, the original ten cities offered their experience to help guide the agenda planning for the Urban Partnerships National Academy held in June 2006. Bringing together stakeholders from 26 cities, the National Academy gave city teams the opportunity to engage in interactive dialogue and collaboration around their unique experiences serving TANF clients in urban centers. States in attendance account for 75.4% of the national TANF caseload. Please look for the final Academy report due out in late Summer 2006.

4 Briggs, Xavier and Snyder, William. (November 2003). Communities of Practice: A New Tool for Government Managers. IBM Center for the Business of Government. Retrieved February 27, 2006. [http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/Snyder\\_report.pdf](http://www.businessofgovernment.org/pdfs/Snyder_report.pdf).

The Urban Partnerships Initiative would like to thank the following participants for attending the Leadership Forum:

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